

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 18, 2005

An Across-the-Board Budget Cut Could Mean More Sacrifice for Veterans

Dear Democratic Colleague:

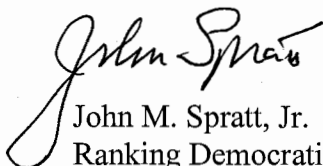
This week, the House is expected to consider a plan – in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita – to amend the budget resolution with spending cuts even *deeper* than the budget resolution now mandates. While the precise details of the legislation have not yet been made public, the Budget Committee Chairman has proposed, in addition to further mandatory cuts, across-the-board cuts to appropriations of up to 2 percent. Though it remains to be seen whether the appropriations cuts will actually be included in the final package, such a cut would adversely impact many programs that already have shortfalls, including veterans' health care.

This summer, Congress added \$1.5 billion to the FY 2005 budget to mitigate shortfalls in the veterans' health care budget. The Administration also submitted a \$2 billion budget amendment to address acute shortfalls in the 2006 budget. These additional resources are needed to maintain current services and to care for a greater than anticipated number of veterans returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. An across-the-board 2 percent reduction to the House-passed discretionary level for Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) would mean a reduction of more than \$600 million, making current identified shortfalls even worse. Based on VA projected health care costs, this reduction translates to nearly 100,000 fewer veterans receiving health care this year.

Veterans groups are speaking out regarding this recent development. Attached is a letter from *The American Legion* expressing concern that a 2 percent reduction would mean "...rationing of care, hiring freezes of medical personnel, delaying repairs on facilities, growing backlogs of medical equipment, and many other fiscal-based constraints."

Veterans' health care must be treated as the important priority that it is. Especially at a time when demand for these critical services is likely to be increasing, budget cuts to veterans' health care should be off the table. If you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact the House Budget Committee (6-7200) or House Veterans Affairs Committee (5-9756) Democratic staffs.

Sincerely,



John M. Spratt, Jr.
Ranking Democratic Member
House Budget Committee



Lane Evans
Ranking Democratic Member
House Veterans' Affairs Committee

The American Legion



For God and Country

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October 17, 2005

Honorable John M. Spratt, Jr., Ranking Democrat
Committee on the Budget
U.S. House of Representatives
B-71 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515-6065

Dear Representative Spratt:

The American Legion is deeply concerned over the anticipated amendment to the Budget Resolution (H. Con. Res. 95) and its adverse impact on benefits awarded to military veterans -- past, present, and future.

Wisely, Congress recently added \$1.5 billion to the FY 2005 budget for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) due primarily because of a fiscal shortfall related to the war on terrorism. Recently separated veterans of Operations Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Iraqi Freedom (OIF) are turning to VA for timely access to quality health care. As a result, many of these OEF and OIF veterans were awarded service-connected disability rating for medical conditions developed while on active-duty and will continue to be patients for many, many years to come.

Although the FY 2006 VA budget is not finalized, reports of "cuts" in discretionary and mandatory appropriations to "offset" costs associated with the war on terrorism and disaster relief places growing caution among Legionnaires and other veterans across the country. In reality, funding shortfalls translates to rationing of care, hiring freezes of medical personnel, delaying repairs on facilities, growing backlogs of medical equipment, and many other fiscal-based constraints.

As you and your colleagues continue your efforts to amend H. Con. Res. 95, please keep in mind the personal sacrifices and hardships endured by America's veterans and the thanks of a grateful nation. Veterans' benefits are only earned through honorable military service.

Sincerely,

Steve Robertson, Director
National Legislative Commission